

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 885

RC 023 908

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TITLE Indigenous Teaching Programs: The Benefits of Teaching Indigenous Australian Studies in a Cross-Cultural Context.  
PUB DATE 2002-12-04  
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education (Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, December 4, 2002).  
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: <http://www.aare.edu.au/02pap/sim02621.htm>.  
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Aboriginal Australians; \*Cross Cultural Training; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Indigenous Knowledge; \*Indigenous Personnel; Interdisciplinary Approach; \*Preservice Teacher Education; Student Attitudes; Student Surveys; Teacher Surveys; \*Teaching Methods; \*World Views  
IDENTIFIERS Australia (Queensland); \*Griffith University (Australia)

## ABSTRACT

An Australian national survey of 10,019 primary and secondary teachers suggested that preparation in Indigenous Australian studies held the lowest ranking of national priority items. In addition, a national qualitative study identified inadequacies in teacher preparation for teaching Indigenous Australian studies, especially in secondary schools. At Griffith University in Brisbane (Queensland), non-Indigenous preservice teachers receive cross-cultural training from a team of five Indigenous educators. Indigenous teachers use an interdisciplinary approach to teach students their worldview more than specific facts or knowledge. An Indigenous worldview is the relationship of priority, importance, and responsibility to the human and physical world. An Indigenous worldview requires students to accept the concept of difference. The greatest understanding students need to achieve is that knowledge is created through individual or group perception and that truth is a perspective. Indigenous educators rarely teach in an abstract or conceptual sense. Through cultural, community, and personal anecdotal experiences, they create a personalized approach to developing culturally sensitive students. The Indigenous teaching staff targets greater understanding of the Indigenous Australian experience as the course's productive outcome. A study examining preservice teachers' views about their experience in this course found that students expressed a strong increase in understanding and substantial engagement with the topic. (Contains 27 references.) (TD)

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## Indigenous Teaching Programs: The benefits of teaching Indigenous Australian Studies in a cross-cultural context.

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A Paper presented at the AARE Conference, 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2002, Brisbane.

### ABSTRACT:

To examine the complex issues prevailing for preservice and inservice teacher training in Indigenous Australian Studies, this paper draws on two recent national studies and a local study by an Indigenous educator. Quantitative and qualitative research findings prime us for the cross-cultural case study. The national studies include, the census style study of *Teachers in Australian Schools* (Dempster, Sim, Beere and Logan, 2000), and the qualitative *National Inquiry into School History* (Taylor, 2000a). First, the paper written across these boundaries examines the data from the national studies, bringing to light the limited experience of teachers to professional development in Indigenous Australian Studies. The quantitative and qualitative analysis provides an opening for considering a recent research case study conducted by Barry Malezer, an Indigenous educator at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. The case study explores the dynamics of teaching Indigenous Australian Studies (cross-culturally) to non-Indigenous preservice teachers by an Indigenous teaching team at Griffith University. Throughout the discussion, we ask readers to consider the extent to which the findings about professional development in Indigenous Australian Studies resonate with their individual experiences at system and local levels.

### Introduction

The focus of the paper is positioned within four educational frameworks: curriculum, pedagogy, policy and cross-cultural teaching. Indigenous Australian Studies, nationally recommended as part of a school curriculum brings with it supplementary curriculum issues than other 'study' areas that are deemed worthwhile for students to learn. Baker (2000) has observed that schooling provides the terrain for contests over knowledge and the determinants of cultural tradition. Further, as Apple (1993) noted, "*a selective tradition operates in which only specific groups' knowledge becomes official knowledge*" [emphasis in original] (p. 65). That is, "educational issues have consistently involved major conflicts and compromises among groups with compelling visions of 'legitimate' knowledge, what counts as 'good' teaching and learning, and what is a just society" (Apple, 2001 p. 65). In 1993, Robert Tickner eluded to these needs.

.....most non-Indigenous Australians alive today, including people in the State of Queensland, receive an abysmal education about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. And not only did our education not tell us things that were important to understand, a great many things including the depth and antiquity and the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

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history and culture, but in many ways our own text book and our education taught us to be prejudicial.

(Tickner, in Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (1993))

The ever-flattening population growth in Australia also gives further implication by the following statistics, specifically the increase of the Indigenous Australian population:

**People of Indigenous Origin, (Australia)**

There were 410,003 people (2.2%) (201,988 males and 208,015 females) in Australia who identified as being of Indigenous origin in the 2001 Census. This represents an increase of 57,033 people (16.2%) (28,157 males and 28,876 females) since the 1996 Census, and an increase of 144,632 people (54.5%) (70,598 males and 74,034 females) since the 1991 Census. In the 1996 Census, there were 352,970 people (2.0%) (173,831 males and 179,139 females) who identified as being of Indigenous origin, and 265,371 people (1.6%) (131,390 males and 133,981 females) who identified as being of Indigenous origin in the 1991 Census.

**People of Indigenous Origin, (Queensland)**

There were 112,772 people (3.1%) (54,582 males and 58,190 females) who identified as being of Indigenous origin in the 2001 Census. This represents an increase of 17,254 people (18.1%) (7,796 males and 9,458 females) since the 1996 Census compared to a general population increase of 8.5%, and an increase of 42,670 people (60.9%) (19,819 males and 22,851 females) since the 1991 Census. (ABS, 2001 Census Basic Community Profile and Snapshot)

(ABS, 2001 Census Basic Community Profile and Snapshot)

**Indigenous Australian children in public schooling, (Queensland)**

According to Education Queensland statistics (2000), 2353 Indigenous students attended Year 7 public schools representing 6.28% of all public school year 7 students. Additional to these figures Year 1 Indigenous students (2000) at 2958 represent 7.26% of the states total (Education Queensland, 2002 Schooling Statistics).

Thus the imperative to improve the opportunities for Australian students to gain knowledge in Indigenous Studies is strengthened. In Queensland, opportunities for students in the compulsory years of schooling to study Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander cultures is represented within the current Studies of Society and the Environment Syllabus. For the post-compulsory years of schooling it is within the History syllabuses - both ancient and modern - where there are topics in which students can investigate issues associated with Indigenous Australian history. There is also a post compulsory syllabus titled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (QSA, 2001). While syllabuses support the explicit teaching and learning of Indigenous Australian Studies in the school curriculum, and while there is a clear warrant in both educational policy and research for such teaching and learning, evidence suggests that for many teachers, there is a reluctance to take up such opportunities. In what follows, we examine this issue seeking the reasons for this reluctance, and suggesting how

teacher education might affect change. To this end, we first draw on the most recent national, census style study of *Teachers in Australian Schools* (Dempster, Sim, Beere and Logan, 2000) and the *National Inquiry School History* (Taylor, 2000a) to investigate teachers' professional development - both preservice and inservice - in Indigenous Australian Studies.

The analyses provide an opening for considering a desired approach to professional development provision in this area. Throughout the discussion, we ask readers to consider the extent to which the findings about professional development in Indigenous Australian Studies resonate with their individual experiences at system and local levels.

### **The national studies**

#### *1. Teachers in Australian Schools Study*

In the *Teachers in Australian Schools Study*<sup>i</sup> (2000) a quantitative census-style methodology was used to survey over 20,000 teachers in Government and Non-Government schools. The sample was determined and produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and featured independent sampling for primary and secondary schools stratified by state and sector. Over 10,000 respondents completed the survey questionnaire, respondents coming from Government, Catholic and Independent schools across the country.

The primary purposes of the study were to prepare a profile of teachers in Australia at the turn of the century and to compare that profile with previous profiles produced from studies conducted by the Australian College of Education in 1963, 1979 and 1989. The survey sought information on several major areas including: the employment status<sup>ii</sup> and demographics of Australian teachers; official positions and gender; career intentions over the next three years; further professional development and membership of professional and community organizations; professional qualifications, and age. Additionally, there was a section that sought information on national priority areas of which Indigenous Australian Studies was one. The data presented in this paper are drawn from this section in particular.

The following discussion presents cross-sectional analyses of the data, addressing the national profile of teacher training in Indigenous Australian Studies, and the profile of teacher participation in Indigenous Australian Studies in terms of schooling sector profiles (i.e., Government, Catholic and Independent sectors). Also of interest are the profiles of training

across the states and territories, highlighting differences in training provision relating to location and to level of schooling (primary or secondary years).

#### The national profile

PRIORITY AREA	RESPONDENTS								
	Pre-service training only		In-service training only		Both pre- & in-service training		No response		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Literacy	732	7.3	3388	33.8	1875	18.7	4024	40.2	100.0
Numeracy	848	8.5	2106	21.0	1493	14.9	5572	55.6	100.0
ESL	602	6.0	1197	11.9	345	3.4	7875	78.6	100.0
ATSI students	500	5.0	1206	12.0	256	2.6	8057	80.4	100.0
Indigenous Studies	372	3.7	808	8.1	194	1.9	8645	86.3	100.0
Information Tech.	462	4.6	3189	31.8	718	7.2	5650	56.4	100.0

**Table 1: Types of training that respondents had undertaken in nominated priority areas (n=10019)**

Significantly, of the 10,019 respondents to the questionnaire, 86.3% did not respond to this item, suggesting no access to such preparation. Of the national priority items in this question, experience of preparation in Indigenous Australian Studies was the most poorly represented. Of the small amount of preparation received, the majority had experienced it through inservice not preservice programs.

#### Sectors and Access

TYPE OF TRAINING	SCHOOLING SECTOR					
	GOVERNMENT		CATHOLIC		INDEPENDENT	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Pre-service only	168	3.2	114	4.5	87	4.0
In-service only	476	9.1	241	9.6	81	3.6
Both pre- & in-service	109	2.1	64	2.5	20	0.9
No response	4464	85.6	2096	83.3	1965	91.3
Total	5217	100.0	2515	100.0	2153	100.0

**Table 2 Types of training that respondents in each schooling sector had undertaken in the priority area of Indigenous Studies**

As mentioned in the discussion of the overall survey results, Indigenous Australian Studies was the priority area in which survey respondents were least likely to offer any response. The table above reflects those results, while also revealing differences between the Independent schooling sector and the other two sectors, in terms of teachers' training in this priority area. Less than one tenth (8.7%) of respondents from the Independent sector reported that they had training in teaching primary or secondary school level Indigenous Australian Studies; this

compares with 16.7% of respondents from the Catholic sector and 14.4% of those from the Government sector. For respondents in all sectors who had experienced some preparation in Indigenous Australian Studies, the majority of their experience had been through inservice activities.

### State and Territory provision

It was also the Northern Territory that had the largest proportion of teachers with training - through either preservice or inservice provision - in Indigenous Australian Studies at either primary or secondary school level (see Table 3). A little more than one quarter (27.9%) of respondents from the Northern Territory reported that they had completed such training through pre- and/or in-service courses. This compared with only 5.6% of respondents from Victoria and 8.4% of those from Queensland. While South Australian respondents had little preservice experience, inservice provision (16.3 + 2.6% = 18.9%) was amongst the highest of all the states and territories (NT = 16.4 + 5.2% = 21.6%)

	STATE/TERRITORY															
	NSW		ACT		VIC		QLD		SA		WA		TAS		NT	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
PreS only	48	5.3	47	5.2	23	2.0	55	3.4	30	2.6	37	4.8	15	2.2	23	6.3
InS only	82	9.0	75	8.3	26	3.1	63	3.9	192	16.3	70	9.0	66	9.9	60	16.4
Both pre- & in-	18	2.0	23	2.5	5	0.4	17	1.1	30	2.6	20	2.6	15	2.2	19	5.2
No resp	764	83.8	758	83.9	1084	94.4	1473	91.6	924	78.6	649	83.6	573	85.7	264	72.1
Total	912	100.	100.	100.	1148	100.	1608	100.	1176	100.	776	100.	669	100	366	100.

**Table 3: Types of training that respondents in each State/Territory had undertaken in the priority area of Indigenous Studies**

### Provision by level of schooling

In focusing on the two parts of the survey question seeking information on primary and secondary training, it is clear that experience of any training in Indigenous Australian Studies included in the survey, is mainly associated with primary schooling. Queensland is the exception. Of the few Queensland respondents (135) to this question, 6.3% were primary, and 4.2% were secondary. Regardless of sector, most training occurs for primary teachers. Of the three sectors, the data from Independent school teachers suggest that they experienced the least training. Teachers in the Catholic and Government sectors had similar preservice



training experiences, while inservice experiences were greatest amongst teachers in the Government sector.

## *2. The National Inquiry into School History*

The *Teachers in Australian Schools Study* confirms the limited experience by teachers in the teaching area of Indigenous Australian Studies. The *National Inquiry into School History* (Taylor, 2000a) was established and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) to examine the status and nature of school history in Australia. It focussed mainly on qualitative research techniques to ascertain how history was being taught in schools in all states and territories. Of interest from this study are the comments by teachers specific to pre-training issues in the area of Indigenous Australian Studies.

The inquiry team met with Focus Groups in each state and territory to ascertain teachers' views on the status of school history. At the same time interviews were held with curriculum officials in state/territory boards of study of curriculum councils. The questions related to curriculum content issues, the teaching and learning of history; school organisation and its implications for history teaching, and finally the training and professional development of history teachers.

### General Issues

For the compulsory years of schooling, Indigenous Australian Studies are embedded in the key learning area known nationally as "Studies of Society and the Environment". This area has a variety of subject 'names' across states, systems and even schools. Generally in most states in Australia in the compulsory years of schooling, 'Studies of Society and the Environment' tends to be used, although History as a school subject may also exist. The findings of the inquiry overall identified that in preparing primary teachers in a four year teacher education preservice program, the study of history was calculated to be approximately one/one hundredth of the whole program (Taylor, 2000a). As one primary principal commented:

*I have a lot of very talented young teachers in my school but their knowledge of history is very poor*

A teacher commented that

*...Teachers are reluctant to teach something they don't know much about. A lot of primary teachers would not be confident (enough) to teach history..*

In its discussion of its findings, the Executive Report (Taylor, 2000b:vi) identified that respondents expressed strong concerns about perceived inadequacies in teacher preparation and professional development for "dealing with content and sensitivities of indigenous history"

This was especially so in the secondary school. For the secondary teachers who were interviewed in the study, the problems of teaching SOSE or History were many. For example, the learning area generally was not viewed as a staffing priority in schools. Thus teachers with little background often teach the lower secondary school students in this area. The difficulties are exacerbated by tensions that exist among teachers who are qualified in history, over integrated versus single discipline subjects, for example, history or geography. The inquiry identified the recurring motif in states and territories of the struggle for space in the timetable - the word "battle" occurred again and again.

In this context, a major concern was the condition of Australian history. Most discussions were dominated by the declining status of Australian history as a school subject. This included views that it lacked coherence and that it was repetitious. Teachers interviewed spoke of the negativity of students towards such studies. One teacher commented:

*You notice with Australian history that it's the same topics that they do over and over again with no sense of continuity. I remember saying to my Year 10s, "we're going to do Colonisation and change: what happened to indigenous peoples". And they said "We've done aboriginal history. We don't want to do any more" ....*

#### Issues specific to teaching Indigenous History

Most states and territories have a special emphasis in their curriculum policy on Indigenous Australian history. The Education Ministers at their meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2000, agreed to *A Statement of Principles and Standards for More Culturally Inclusive Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. This statement endorses a curriculum that *"supports all students to understand and*



*acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society...." (Principle 1.6).*

Many of the teachers interviewed in the inquiry were personally committed to Indigenous Australian Studies and in the primary schools there seemed to be quite widespread and positive emphasis on indigenous history and culture. However secondary school indigenous history seemed to be much more difficult. The following are some of the comments interviewees made:

*...The community is racist and (there are) even colleagues who scoff at the idea of having the (Aboriginal studies ) content.*

*There isn't much support for Aboriginal studies and there is even a fear of doing the wrong thing. Like using the wrong terminology.*

*...Some teachers find these topics risky. There is insufficient time to cover everything.*

*...we try to teach Aboriginal content but it is very difficult with the parent community...We actually got some help from the (Aboriginal Studies) Centre because the teachers were having to deal with attitudes in kids that are reinforced in the community. There are no Aboriginal kids in the school.*

(Taylor,2000a)

The inquiry did identify some very positive experiences also but the concerns raised above are some of the major anxieties expressed about teaching Indigenous Australian history to indigenous and non-indigenous students. These issues have significance to the following discussion of providing professional knowledge to teachers in the area of Indigenous Australian Studies.

### **Professional development for teachers: what knowledge and why?**

Within teacher training institutions there is a tension that exists in developing well-qualified practitioners and creating dedicated professionals. Where does exemplary practice and practitioner expertise deliver its goods for the discipline of a 'missing paradigm'? (Martinez, 1997). Since 1970, national 'Aboriginal Education' programs have focussed their attention on

teacher training institutions to rectify anomalies in Australian education for and about Aboriginal Australians.

Aboriginal studies has a dual purpose. While it can create an avenue for young Aboriginal children to develop or maintain a pride in their cultural heritage, it can also be used as an effective tool in sensitising non-Aborigines to the rich and complex aspects of Aboriginal society.

(National Aboriginal Education Committee, 1985:31)

The formula of university training and personal experience adds excellence to teaching (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). Tacit and institutional knowledge should be considered as essential building blocks for curricula where discipline expertise is not directly available or perhaps established. The ideal for preservice teachers to best deliver Aboriginal curriculum, should be that their prior training and knowledge match that of an 'Elder' with appropriate tertiary qualifications or at least have possession of a major in Indigenous Australian studies from a recognised institution. Here exists the 'missing paradigm'.

In Griffith as in most Australian universities, not all teachers gain even one subject of Indigenous Australian studies. Yet all are assumed through their degree to have gained substantial knowledge to teach Studies of Society and the Environment, which under a national priority contains core-learning outcomes requiring learning about Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies (QSA, 2000; Craven, 1999). This is in a context where, for many years Aboriginal educators have viewed 'public indifference' as a barrier to the establishment and success of Aboriginal education programs.

The Budby Report (1982) supported the view that schools treat Aboriginal Studies in the same way that the Australian public treats Aboriginal people, with indifference and neglect. (cited in Groome, 1994:5)

Within this view how easily will change occur in Australia's knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? And what is the knowledge that needs to be changed? Over 200 years of interaction with Western ways has created many adaptations and modifications to the individual and group identities of Indigenous Australians (Evans et al., 1975; Reynolds, 1990). One of the most detrimental factors to this was the 'Aboriginal Preservation and Protection Act' enforced through each state in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Land, 1994). Through a substantial period of time (nearly 100 years) and with Aboriginal people predominantly displaced and hidden in reserves and missions (Evans et al., 1988), many

Australians constructed their own (negative) view of Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal academic Lillian Holt reasons that 'popular beliefs' of Australians plays a significant impact on the individual and collective identity of Indigenous Australians. However much more needs to be considered.

Healing has to identify the whole gamut of emotions, including complacency, denial, confusion and renewal, with their inherent, good, bad, indifferent, palatable and unpalatable aspects... This diversity results in different patterns of behaviour. Some indigenous Australians ignore their heritage. Others pretend that they are from backgrounds they perceive to be more acceptable to non-indigenous Australians... For other indigenous Australians it has been too difficult to acknowledge their heritage and accept its meaning, resulting in denial by both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Many indigenous Australians are scarred by such experiences. Some feel that they, or others, have had to comprise themselves as indigenous Australians to be accepted, to get employment in order to raise their families, and to achieve a reasonable standard of living. ( Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation,[C.A.R.], 1994:9)

Wright further explains the view of the creation of an Aboriginal identity: "Whether positive or negative, these images are still white fabrications created for our own often complex reasons" (Wright cited in Bird et al., 1996:139). Indigenous Australians as individuals, families or communities have bore the brunt of a racialisation construction specific to Australia. Keeffe (1992) explores this issue,

The commonly held belief in the public mind is that 'real' Aborigines are considered to be those 'full-bloods' living a tribal lifestyle in the outback (ANOP 1985, 46). These people are different in kind to, and more deserving of special assistance than, the so-called 'half-caste educated radicals' who are the 'stirrers who cause all the trouble'. (p.65)

The Australian public appears to have formed its strongest opinions about Indigenous Australians particularly Aboriginal people to the detriment of today's society. Significantly this has been through a period of time where contact with Aboriginal people was minimal. Most Aboriginal people therefore have been affected by public perceptions and today the strong nature attached to the construction of Aboriginality invokes resistance, antagonism and welfare dependence, the self-fulfilling prophecy. This is evident in some of the comments earlier cited, from interviewees in the *National Inquiry into School History*. The complexity of teaching about 'Aboriginality' is the core essence of the delivery of Indigenous Australian Studies to preservice secondary teachers at Griffith University in Brisbane. The design is underpinned by a cross-cultural delivery that enables a deeper sensitisation for students and hence the Australian public can occur.

### **Preservice preparation: what knowledge and how? –a case study**

The research of Barry Malezer involves the implementation of a cross-cultural (Indigenous) methodology to teaching. Through recording the views of non-Indigenous students, he investigates the quality of this approach in reference to final outcomes of change. The study (1999) addressed the following questions: What significant issues are attached to a student's knowledge of Indigenous Australians? What are identified as differences in this teaching program? How do these differences equate to the objectives of the subject and of the teachers? How well are these objectives met? How effectively has learning taken place? How distinctly do students express their change in understanding from this subject? And, What significance does this 'experience of learning' have to future teaching programs?

Graduate teachers can be the major change agents necessary in developing a cultural understanding of Indigenous Australians by the 'public' (Craven, 1999; C.A.R. 1994). In order to achieve this aim it is necessary to engage preservice teachers in experiencing cross-cultural aspects of teaching. In this way, these future teachers develop insights about the significance of their understandings of themselves and their perceptions of Indigenous Australian issues to their teaching. As a result significant change in the classrooms of the future is possible. Malezer believes Indigenous teachers have through a 'difference' in teaching, produced relevant change in student understanding. Indigenous teachers use a different approach in teaching. The 'difference' (cross-cultural) may most easily be expressed within their Indigenous Worldview<sup>1</sup> of teaching, learning and understanding.

Australian Indigenous (cultural) studies is a unique '*culturology*'. This term, coined by Leslie White was used to distinguish the study of culture from sociology, *The study of cultural phenomena 'in their own right'* (Langness, 1977:154). Therefore Griffith's course and teaching challenges the "Western" academic world of knowledge for its belief of truth more so than the acquisition of truth (knowledge). The discipline therefore of Indigenous Australian studies bonds areas of philosophy, social and education science as a single discipline and students understanding may be best represented by small gains of content knowledge and large gains of critical thought within the subject or discipline understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous Worldview is considered to be the way Indigenous people perceive the world and this perception is relational to teaching and learning, e.g. teachers in the classroom need to practically make a difference, not just teach.

To develop a subject inclusive of the dynamics of Indigenous Australia, many issues need consideration from the standpoint of difference. In other words rarely can one Indigenous educator cater for the range of cross-disciplinary dimensions required and for its 'cultural' placement, s/he must be reflective of whose traditional language area the subject is being taught in.

Given the diversity of Indigenous Australian cultures, it is neither possible nor appropriate to design a single prescriptive subject for all universities and Indigenous communities. (Craven, 1996:2)

If Craven is correct then multiple perceptions dictate that Indigenous Australian Studies cannot be taught or understood through content but moreover through the challenge of content and its connections to the experienced world and people's perceptions of how that is constructed. In the university subject that forms the basis of Malezer's study, its development incorporated from its initial stage a cooperative teaching team of one non-Indigenous lecturer with two community guest speakers delivering the community/individual perspective. With the progressive employment by Griffith University of more qualified Indigenous educators in the GUMURRII Centre<sup>2</sup>, teaching of the Indigenous Australian Studies course was given the autonomy of being taught solely by the Indigenous Australian staff.

At the time of the study the teaching team consisted of five Indigenous Australian staff. The GUMURRII Centre then appropriately allocated the discipline specific areas within the subject to be taught by those staff considered more proficient or aligned to these areas, eg. 'Aboriginal health' lecture taught by staff who possessed nursing backgrounds, or 'Identity' (Aboriginality) taught by staff who could express more strongly appropriate knowledge of Elders, Culture and family Kinship experiences and where possible reflective of Brisbane's cultural foundations. While each staff member is knowledgeable through life experience and formal learning, there is also an advocacy of Indigenous knowledge as the basis of our teaching. Indigenous knowledge on this premise is a composite of family or group cultural knowledge and contemporary experience.

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<sup>2</sup> GUMURRII Centre for Indigenous Australian, research, education and student support was established nearly 20 years ago. Our primary function is to attend to study needs of Indigenous Australian students (over 300) studying at Griffith Uni.

For students, the aim is to provide a learning experience that aligns actively to their prior knowledge and an interactive shift to 'true' understanding of Indigenous Australians and contemporary issues. The point that shifts this understanding consistently is that even though the teaching staff grew up in many places across Brisbane, Queensland and other Australian states, they give appropriate recognition to the cultural placement they possess as one of many Indigenous perspectives. No single story can explain the Aboriginal experience.

#### Understanding as knowledge challenged

Indigenous teachers maintain their identity in a multiplicity of ways - aligning to home/family, work, community, and state, national and international contacts. Therefore Indigenous Australian academics develop an extensive range of cross-cultural views. Most Indigenous academics view education in formal, informal and personalised ways, meaning also that each has a difference to the other. Multiple Indigenous teaching teams therefore exist as a unique asset to the teaching of Indigenous Australian Studies. However, within this complexity a common point remains established, that being the 'Indigenous Worldview'.

An Indigenous Worldview is the relationship of priority, importance and responsibility to the human and physical world. The human and physical world being that which is real and of practical purpose. Indigenous educators rarely teach in an abstract or conceptual sense. The human quality reflected in our teaching requires sharing hence reciprocal relationship to be created between student and teacher. Indigenous teachers then, personalise the approach through anecdotal experiences using cultural, community and personal experiences. The relational aspect then is the responsibility to provide for real life.

An Indigenous Worldview represents the innate cultural connection among Indigenous Australians. Separated from the physical and observable elements of culture, it continues to be a spiritual essence lying deep within the foundation of Indigenous Australians. The teaching staff in the course, whose cultural, family and life experiences vary, maintain a commonality or Indigenous base to teaching and learning. That is by using their cultural base and lived experience including formal/informal education, they prioritise strong human qualities of caring and sharing in the classroom (Craven, 1998). Caring reflects the interest in the student wellbeing as well as recognising the need to sensitise and develop understanding. Sharing indicates a reciprocal relationship with students where opinions and beliefs are less threatened and experiential knowledge is valued. Open engagement can function once reciprocity is

established in the classroom or specifically the tutorial. This openness also maintains the respect of the Indigenous (cultural) and personal knowledge, remembering that cultural knowledge of each Indigenous staff member is significantly different according to traditional language and clan groupings.

From this perspective it is clear that Indigenous Australians can never utilise a single paradigm of knowledge. The process for acquiring knowledge of Indigenous Australian Studies requires students to adhere to the notion of 'differences in difference' and that the student learning process must remain a notion of understanding options of difference rather than *the difference*. Students only gain understanding if redefining their previous learnt concepts of truth. In other words students need to question and redefine their own thoughts of the experienced world. Truth becomes the abstract, and 'open mindedness of predisposition' becomes the reality. Understanding and relationships to various knowledge therefore is gained by experiencing not one difference to the 'story' but being engaged in multiple 'stories' therefore redefining truth as perhaps constantly being unknown or as an individual perspective.

The greatest understanding students need to take on is that knowledge and perception are created through the individual (or group) perception. Indigenous worldview requires the student to accept the concept of difference. Even to the point where Craven's (1999) text is recommended to deliver difference and immediately critiqued to be not quite right.<sup>3</sup> Therefore a student needs to understand moderation or variation to knowledge is the first acquisition through their studies. The confusion that may be encumbered on the student will be that little attempt in their studies is made to address surface learning, that is facts dates, and specific content. Moreover the Indigenous teaching staff, as a common belief, targets greater understanding of their experience of Indigenous Australia as the productive outcome. Acting on their experience [portrayed by Laurillard's (1993) stage three of acquiring knowledge] is the most important stage of defining knowledge as the known. Hence, Malezer's key research area is to not research "understanding" as knowledge gained but rather understanding as knowledge challenged (Suzuki, 1990).

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<sup>3</sup> Teaching Aboriginal Studies text was produced for NSW schools and therefore takes a more agitated view than the Queensland' experience would portrait.



Students need to attain the notion that they are also the integral component or initiates to the fact that knowledge is not truth but a perception or (world) view of that knowledge. Students must break the ground that the technology of teaching and learning as their quest is beyond a single truth. 'Feedback' then, as outlined by Laurillard (1993), becomes that the initial perspective gained is not endorsed totally but rather re-perceived again through the tutorial and further intentions of knowledge. Students may even shift into the concept of 'problem solving' as an adjunct to our teaching Indigenous Australian studies.

#### The Study: How do students respond to this approach?

Three methods of data collection were used to extract student perceptions of teaching and learning and to explore openly the preservice teachers' views on their experience of the teaching in the course, Indigenous Australian Studies. These were baseline surveys, personal interviews and subject evaluation sheets. The first was to establish baseline information about the student knowledge on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how they felt about this. The second involved semi-structured interviews, recorded and subsequently transcribed to hard copy. One to one interviews were conducted and prior to each interview students were informed of their rights in not answering questions or removing material from transcripts. The third method, subject evaluation sheets included a specific question addressing the student's perception of their changes in understanding. There were 26 students who participated in the baseline survey and course evaluation. Six students were interviewed.

An intrinsic objective of Indigenous Australian Studies at Griffith University has always been to establish a more positive informed view of Aboriginal Australians. In the teaching of this course staff present the content material with anecdotal stories relating back to lived experience, the [their] real world'. This, Malezer refers to **experiential teaching** style and believes it to develop strong processes of learning and understanding by building on prior knowledge. This also creates a **volition model** of learning for most students. Prosser and Trigwell (1999) refer to the need to causal *link* teachers' approaches to teaching and the students' approaches to learning (1999:160-162). In the course, the teachers are focused on teaching about 'Aboriginal people' (their own experience) and students become self-motivated to learn about 'Aboriginal people' particularly for their own experience of 'truth and opinion'.

Analysis of the data collected clearly demonstrated that students in the study did develop an immense satisfaction with the outcomes of this subject. They expressed not only a strong increase in understanding but a substantial engagement with the topic. To refer back to Prosser and Trigwell (1999):

Everything in this chapter would be for naught if we were not able to find a link between the way university teachers teach and the way their students learn (p.157).

Perhaps passionate teachers conceive passionate students or volition learning is a product of engaging with unknown knowledge or as one participant expressed it,

*I think people use different strategies of learning with the different lecturers and to get a range is really good.*

Indigenous Australian Studies at Griffith has found the mark, student deep learning. How do we best relate the teaching process to the quality of the outcome?

The evidence collected suggests that the students however skeptical in starting, have more easily than other courses engaged in learning. Students in Indigenous Australian Studies, however already approach their studies in various ways, from a formal content focus to an informal real life growth experience. Indigenous Australian Studies has an onus of an informal approach to delivery, using formal and informal lecture techniques, perhaps because students are asked to understand far more than they learn. They are asked to search for not only a base of critical inquiry but an adjustment to their concepts of 'knowledge' and 'truth'. There was evidence in this research suggesting that students' motivation was enhanced by this approach.

The teaching staff's intention is to develop culturally sensitive and aware students. The teaching team (a minimum of five Indigenous Australians) remains as a unique feature within Griffith University. The success of our process appears to be determined more because limits rarely exist. Indigenous Australian Studies contains a vast range of content to deliver and this subject remains as perhaps the only 'genuine' cross-cultural experience available to pre-service teachers. Then again, our cross-cultural experience, as explained has its own commonality between GUMURRII centre's teachers. One participant in the study states the imperative nature of teaching Indigenous Australian Studies as:

*...it's just so vital to every Australian to understand where we come from rather than the status quo. People are sort of understanding of the present situation and don't like to change you know, they've got to look at the past and why it's like it is today. So, because of the history, I'm doing history and I enjoy this subject and also the tutorials. I enjoy the discussions.*

Another factor expressed through this research was the contemporary nature of the subject. Aboriginal issues exist as not only a phenomenon of Australia but also as significant issue of Australian society. Malezer's synopsis is that an Indigenous methodology has tremendous appeal to students. That is human values and actions determine meaningful interactions for students. Society has ventured so far into the domain of knowledge through universities, that the meaningfulness and relational base to life can become obscure. Indigenous Worldview is established on humanness and relationship, easily forgotten in an advancing knowledge compendium. Student centred learning falls easily within a base of human relations. Therefore our teaching is student centred but also attaches further to their needs within education. Motivation, conation and volition models can also be neatly sidestepped if we sell out our culture and human values for materialistic, institutional and individualistic ideals.

## **Conclusion**

Drawing on the two recent national studies , the survey style *Teachers in Australian Schools* (Dempster, Sim, Beere and Logan, 2000), and the qualitative *National Inquiry into School History*(Taylor, 2000) the discussion in this paper has emphasised the imperative of effective professional development programs in Indigenous Australian Studies for teachers. In this regard, the survey does not lay claim to being wholly comprehensive of professional development components, nor does it seek to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of State and Territory approaches to professional development for the teaching of Indigenous Australian Studies. However, as a significant source of teacher self-reported evidence about professional development experience, the survey data make clear how the provision of such experience varies with age, location and employment sector. Of more fundamental significance is that the data suggest a disjuncture between policy initiatives and practice, with some teachers reporting no experience in preservice and inservice training in Indigenous Australian Studies.

The National Inquiry study also raises serious issues about the extent to which we can achieve equal opportunity for all students when the teaching profession itself seems not uniformly well prepared to deliver quality education opportunities generally in the social sciences, and

more specifically Indigenous Australian Studies within that area. If Indigenous Australian Studies initiatives are to have impact in the classroom, then hard questions need to be asked and answered about what constitutes effective teacher preparation in this area at both preservice and inservice levels.

Students come to university studies with different prior experiences formal (educational institutions) and informal (media, family and life experiences). In Australia's situation, formal and informal education has formed and reformed their views on Indigenous Australians, specifically opinions about 'Aboriginal' people. We also need the recognition that 'Aboriginality' is a construction initiated by explorer/historians and proliferated in contemporary times by government, institutions (including education) and policy.

Malezer's research certainly questions the efficient nature of institutional education today. That is large lectures, computer interface and flexible learning are expounded when the student's quality of learning is increased by multiple interactions with teachers presenting multiple perspectives. **Student-centred** learning takes on a more active nature when caring is pronounced. The **volition model** of learning in this research has produced a strong correlation to **experiential** teaching style. Students have not only expressed increased understanding but also evidenced passionate engagements with a previous undesired area.

At Griffith University Indigenous Australian Studies is taught using a cross-cultural teaching methodology including an Indigenous Worldview. This Worldview reflects greater notions of humanness and relationship. Through his research, Malezer argues that a cross-cultural approach to teaching not only reaches its objectives of the course and staff, but that it also engages the student to a point where meaningful 'learning' transpires. In the study, this 'learning' process not only impacted on their university studies but also created a greater understanding to important aspects of their life; their perceived world and their chosen profession.

In concluding, we ask readers to reflect on their experiences of being inducted into knowledge for teaching Indigenous Australian Studies. It is recognised that different theories have predominance in different teacher education institutions for a host of reasons, including the theoretical preferences and alignments of senior research and teaching staff. We contend though that the theories also frame different ways of providing learning opportunities that are

made available to students, and that this has particular significance to the knowledge and attitudes of future teachers towards teaching Indigenous Australian Studies.

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<sup>i</sup> The Teachers in Australian Schools Study was funded by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) and the Australian College of Education, and undertaken by researchers in the Griffith University Centre for Leadership and Management in Education and the University of Queensland.



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